

A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Music in History: Language, Health and Art Implications

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Abstract. Music lives in every culture, yet most current investigations into music are based on Western music and Western listeners. This has not just ignored the cultural richness in music itself, neglected internationalization characteristics of music creators, listeners and resources, but also limited the impact of research on large varieties of societies. In reality, music is multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-facet. Evident in communication, education and healthcare systems, multi-cultural challenges have merged into many aspects of our historical and contemporary societies. Rapid cultural fusion of community and evolutionary development of media and technology have enriched the wealth of music. In this paper, we demonstrate that music has a rich but cross-cultural foundation in history with significance in linguistics, health and art.

Keywords. Art, cross-cultural exploration, language, music, health

1 Introduction

Music, as old as history of human race itself, can be traced in every culture, region and throughout human history [1]-[3]. As an important sub-cultural element, music reflects and registers aesthetics and characteristics of its time in history [4]. Music, being an extraordinary expression of human culture, links to every step of human civilization, deeply integrates into language formation, and also reflects in historical literature and artwork. Currently, recognition and acceptance of music therapy in health practices is still in its infancy and under development. However, knowledge of health and wellbeing effects of music and its therapeutic applications are evidential throughout history and culture. However, the cross-cultural study of music and its historical significance in health and wellbeing has not received much attention. This paper, presents a cross-cultural investigation into music in history with emphasis on health, wellbeing and art. We demonstrate that music has a rich but cross-cultural foundation in history with significance in linguistics, health and art. Both Western and Eastern culture contain sub-culture and sub-groups as well as specific characteristics.

Here, we adopt two broad terms, ‘West’ and ‘East’, to distinguish between two major categories of culture and ethnical groups, which are geographically divided by the country of Israel.

2 Music and Health in Ancient Western Culture

Written languages, as footprints of human history, register ancient knowledge and concepts. English word ‘music’ is derived from ‘moussa’, which is Greek word ‘μουσική’ for ‘muse’. Muses were referring to inspirations of literature, science and arts. Hebrew is one of the ancient conceptual languages. ‘Music’ in Hebrew is ‘מוסיקה’ $\text{מ}\text{ו}\text{ס}\text{י}\text{ק}\text{ה}$. Based on conceptual meaning of each alphabet respectively, ‘for the purpose of God’, ‘use hand to strike (make) sound waves’, ‘move in a circle’, ‘to bring forth light and worship’, it indicates the belief of the ancient Hebrews that sound waves are in circles, musical sound can bring forth light, which may refer to enlightenment, wisdom and hope, besides, the root of music is worship.

Music flourishes in Western history and the use of music in healing was highly valued among ancient Hebrews (2000BC – 200BC), Egyptians (2000BC – 300BC) and Babylonians (1000BC – 300BC). One well-known example is David playing harp to heal King Saul [9, 10] and specific songs were used to prevent spreading of epidemics [11]. Philosopher and musician Boethius (480AD – 524/525AD) believed through order and harmony, music could have therapeutic effects upon all aspects of an individual’s functioning [11, 12]. It was believed by Egyptians that each tone had a specific effect upon individuals. A physician in Babylonian time often also had role in religion and education [13].

The Greek played an influential role in Western culture. During Greek civilization, music was clearly registered being used in therapeutic contexts [14]. The healing power of music was widely recognized among the classical Greek philosophers. Daily regime of singing and playing instrument were promoted by Pythagoras (circa 570–495BC) to help maintain healthy stage of mind. By using singing and playing instrument to change negative emotions such as worry, fear, sorrow and anger, Pythagoras promoted music to his students and public to aid healing [15]. Aristotle (384BC–322BC) and Plato (424/423BC–348/347BC) shared the opinion that pieces of music were the images of characters. Rhythm and melody were considered to be the imitations of anger and gentleness, courage and temperance [16]. The sound of a specific instrument could be assigned to aid the healing of a specific illness and enhance a certain aspect of physical and psychological function. For example, it was believed that the sound of flute could arouse strong emotions and lead to cathartic relief and the sound of harp could aid sleep, digestion and treat mental disorders [17]. Father of western medicine, Greek physician Hippocrates (460–370 BC), one of the most outstanding figures in medicine, introduced musical treatment to patients in 400BC.

In Greek philosophy, it is proposed that conflicts between the four elements (earth, water, air and fire) and the four qualities (heat, cold, dry and moist) result in four humors (black bile, phlegm, blood and yellow bile) [18], [19]. Supported by Galen (129–200/216AD), a prominent Roman physician, surgeon and philosopher, correct type of music could be prescribed to the suitable person to influence these humors and their respective temperaments of melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine and choleric. Music written in Mixolydian, Dorian, Lydian and Phrygian modes were the most frequently prescribed music types [20]. More recently, music therapy flourished in and after World War I and II, beginning from musicians travelling to hospitals and playing music for soldiers suffering from war-related emotional and physical trauma [21]. It is now considered as an allied health profession and is becoming more and more popular in the modern Western societies.

3 Music and Health in Ancient Eastern Culture

In the East, more fascinating beliefs and practices are recorded in ancient Chinese literature. The Inner Canon of Huang Di or the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, Huang Di Nei Jing 《黄帝内经》 (see Fig. 1) is a prestigious Chinese medicine textbooks collected in the Warring States period (475-221BC) and early Han period (206BC–220AD), in which it was written clearly that before the use of herbs or acupuncture, people in China applied musical compositions to heal. It also shows that, music has been considered a crucial way of achieving health and wellbeing in Traditional Chinese Medicine.



Fig. 1. the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon 《黄帝内经》 (Huang Di Nei Jing)
(Right: Context; Left: Table of Content*)

The significant statement above gives a strong explanation of the formation of Chinese character for medicine 藥 (Yao) as a combination of music for 樂 (Yue) and herbs 草 (Cao) (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Chinese Character for 'Medicine'.

Besides of the pictorial illustration of string, metal and wooden instrument as it's written, the three parts of the character contains much deeper understanding of health and wellbeing in ancient China. Based on TCM Five Element theory, the upper part 丝 is linked to the element of fire, the organ of heart, which is believed to dominate one's spirit 精. The middle part 白 is linked to the element of metal, the organ of lung, which is believed to dominate one's Qi 气 or energy channels. The lower part '木' is linked to the element of wood, the organ of liver, which is believed to be dominate one's blood flow and believed to connect the soul 魂 (See Fig. 3).

樂

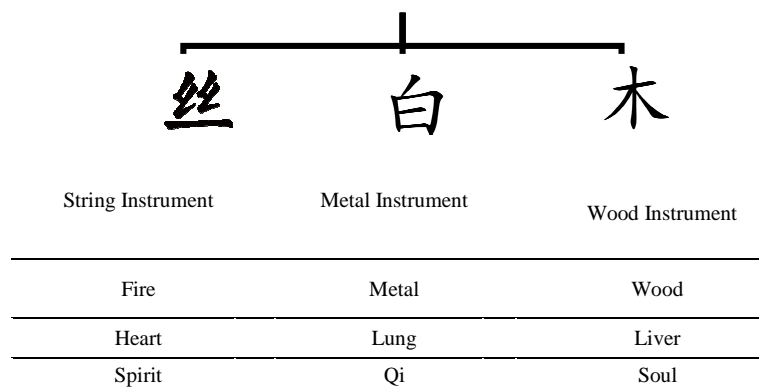


Fig. 3. Compositions of Chinese Character for 'Music'.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the longest existing and effective healing systems from the East [22]. Comparing with Western medicine, which advances in outstanding expertise in intervening directly with large varieties of health issues with significant results, TCM highlights the link between body (身) and mind (心) and characterized by its holistic and indirect approach. TCM theory believes in every cell as a small unit of harmony and highlights the unity of body, mind and spirit as a whole. It is considered every part of human body is integrated and closely connected to each other [23]. The imbalance of the wellbeing of one part has manifestations from the associated parts of the body. These manifestations encourage earlier diagnosis and predictions of the diseases and make prevention possible. Hence, increasing the chances of healing. It is also believed that one is one's own best doctor. Moreover, health and wellbeing comes from everyday life. Living healthily physically, psychologically, emotionally leads to balanced energy holistically and results in better quality of life. Healing of any part of the body should not be treated isolated from consideration of the wellbeing of the mind.

Chinese character for 'illness' is 病, based on I-Ching 《易经》 the Book of Changes or Book of Movement, the lower part '丙' is closely linked to '心', which in Chinese Medicine concept, refers to 'emotion'. Emotion is an invisible key and a double-sided sword that can affect one's health both ways in TCM theories. As for its effects upon body and mind, it was stated in Huang Di Nei Jing (475-221BC, 206BC–220AD) that music could help people to become a balanced being, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Unsolved negative emotions may cause the imbalance of the physical body. It is well recognized in TCM that musical notes to be an essence of life, which could bring harmony and revival in to one's holistic being. The book of 禮記 (Li Ji) 樂禮 (Yue Ji) stated that the sound of music could agitate and stir arteries and veins, which could increase or smooth the blood circulation. The link between music and health is also shown in the pentatonic musical scale in traditional Chinese music. Specifically, the five notes in a pentatonic scale correspond to the five main emotions, which also represent five main inner organs.

For example, a person who is always in the mood of sadness may often develop weakened lungs. A male who easily gets angry may find problem with his liver; a female who is always angry often develops issues with her breasts. Yet, positive emotion can lead to well-balanced energy, which would increase the strength of your immune system. Also in rehabilitation processes, positive and balanced emotion could promote and speed up the recovery of the body. Based on the assessment of individual patient, a TCM practitioner may recommend music that would be able to help to restore the patient to a more balanced and healthy state. On the other hand, sounds or tones that might aggravate the individual's condition are avoided during healing process. Moreover after balance is restored, the TCM practitioner would advise the use of

music for maintaining health based on the individual's underlying constitution (Huang Di Nei Jing, 475-221 BC, 206BC–220AD).

In summary, both similarities and differences exist in Western and Eastern medicine. To some extent, approaches of Western and Eastern medicine are compromising to each other. Taking advantages of both, contemporarily, health practices in China are often a combination of Western medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. The combination is also being gradually accepted in modern Western society healthcare [23]. Particularly, Westerners also started to seek alternative medicine to enhance health and wellbeing.

Above all, it is well recognized in both Western healthcare and Traditional Chinese Medicine that music is closely linked to health wellbeing. These historical beliefs and theories are in line with contemporary research into and application of music. A cross-cultural comparison of music and its applications for health wellbeing purposes (especially examination of the underlying mechanics) can assist us to improve the application of music on an international level.

4 Music and Art: A Cross-Cultural Perspective in History

Understanding and beliefs of music can also be discovered in art forms, which can also provide us with evidences of historical appreciations of music in personal development, family and social interactions, as well as spiritual life. In Western arts, music is involved in numerous forms of masterpieces. Music is a common theme in the works of Phintias, one of the well-known ancient Greek vase painters during Greek civilization period. Fig. 4 illustrates a scene of 'music lesson', with the teacher on the right (ΣΜΙΚΥΔΟΣ) and his student on the left (ΕΥΔΥΜΙΑΔΕΣ) with a narrator in-between. Again this work confirms the important role that music played in ancient Greek.



Fig. 4. Music Lesson by Phintias.

Examples can also be found in more recent art works. 'The Music Lesson' by Sir Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), an English Classicist Painter and Sculptor, beautifully

portrayed the warmth of sitting in mother's blossom and enjoying her learning (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The Music Lesson by Lord Frederic Leighton.

Besides, angels are often painted or sculptured with music instrument (Fig. 6 & 7). 'Angels Playing Music' by Marcantonio Franceschini and 'An Angel Playing a Flageolet' by Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) both illustrated the association of music with higher level of peace and joy.



Fig. 6. Angels Playing Music by Marcantonio Franceschini.



Fig. 7. An Angel Playing a Flageolet by Edward Burne-Jones.

Similarly, the important role of music is evidential in ancient Eastern art on personal, interpersonal and spiritual levels. In ancient China, important role of music is also shown in the requirements of becoming a scholar, which were known as Si Yi (四艺). Fig. 8, a silk painting in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), refers to four artistic skills, including musical skill-Qin (琴); playing chess-Qi (棋); calligraphy-Shu (书) and painting or drawing - Hua (画). Musical skill was ranked primarily, as it was believed that musical training was also considered to be therapeutic and morally transforming. Also, a scholar's love of music can be found in the ancient literature. It was written: 『士無故不撤琴瑟。』, which means, "A gentleman-scholar does not part from his Qin or Se without a good cause." (禮記 Li Ji, 曲禮下 Qu Li Xia, 202BC – 220AD).

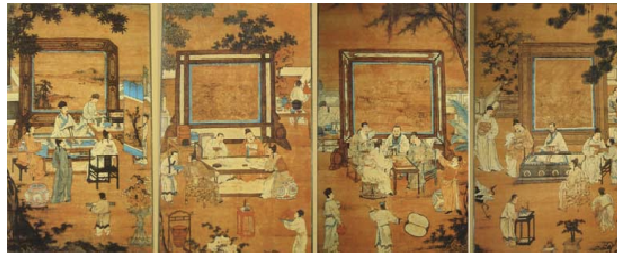


Fig. 8. Eighteen Scholars.
From left to right: Qin (Music); Qi (Chess); Shu (Calligraphy) and Hua (Drawing)

These beliefs of music are also registered in social interactions. One famous Chinese painting Ting Qin Tu (聽琴圖) (Fig. 9) from Song Dynasty (960-1279AD) shows the scene of three close friends gathering in the garden enjoying the pleasure of music playing. The evergreen pine tree, the player is sitting by is a symbol of long and healthy life in oriental arts. It also illustrates the understanding of the link between music and health in the Chinese history.



Fig. 9. Listening to Qin.

A historical stone statue, sculpted in Northern Wei Dynasty (386 - 534AD) of a Buda playing Gu Qin (Chinese Harp) is shown in Fig. 10. The facial expression of the Buda was especially emphasized to be calm and placid. It concurs with the belief and/or understanding that music has healing power and hence, brings peace to one's body, mind and soul.



Fig. 10. Buddha Playing Gu Qin.

5 Conclusion

In summary, throughout history and cultures, music itself is considered as a factor of higher quality of life. Particularly, the historical and culture influences of music can be seen in the aspects of language formation, intellect, medicine, social interactions and art. Being seen as a complicated art form of healing, significance of musical effects on health and wellbeing is reflected cross-culturally through language, literature,

medicine, practices and beliefs in everyday life. Although in both Western and Eastern history, there are traceable records of health and wellbeing application of music, it seems using music to heal in ancient times was mixed with philosophy, mythology and religion. There is a lack of rigorous, scientific research aimed at proving the existence of 'believed' effects of music and explanations of the underlying mechanism of how music affects health wellbeing are imperatively needed.

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